



Shadow Leaders

Executive Summary

Entrepreneurship is wonderful, but also lonely. Even the greatest entrepreneurs—from Elon Musk to Pieter Zwart—needed mentors, advisors, and sparring partners to make their dreams come true. No one truly grows alone.

Shadow Leaders is a network of experienced entrepreneurs, former CEOs, investors, and specialists who stand by your side, both professionally and personally. We combine strategic acumen with personal guidance, so that you not only grow faster, but also live a more relaxed life.

In this white paper, you will discover:

- Why success is more than profit, and how the 7 spiritual laws of business can help.
- How we support entrepreneurs with honest feedback, strategic sparring, and practical help.
- Two concrete working methods: as **an Advisor** or as a **Non-Executive Director**.
- Who we work for—and why we are not a good fit for everyone.
- What really sets us apart from traditional consultants or coaches.
- Inspiring examples of entrepreneurs and companies (Coolblue, Booking.com, Adyen, Picnic, Bunq) that show that no one does it alone.

The invitation: schedule a confidential 30-minute conversation with us. No sales pitch, just an open conversation to broaden your perspective—business, personal, and maybe even spiritual.

The question is simple: do you dare to take the first step?



Schedule your introductory call with Stefan or Rob now.

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Shadow Leaders – The Invisible Force Behind Your Business and Personal Success

1. Introduction – The lonely top really exists

Entrepreneurship is not a job. It is a lifestyle, an identity, sometimes even an obsession. As a founder, CEO, or ambitious leader, you face countless decisions every day: do I go left or right, invest or wait, hire people or reorganize? And although you are surrounded by employees, customers, investors, and maybe even fans, it can sometimes feel eerily quiet at the top of the ladder.

Investors have their own agenda. Advisors come in with a PowerPoint full of models but disappear as soon as the invoice is paid. And your partner or friends?

You don't want to burden them with every business dilemma. So you swallow a lot on your own.

Take **Elon Musk**. After selling PayPal, he had hundreds of millions, but he put everything into Tesla and SpaceX. The result? At one point, he literally had no money left to pay his rent. Without the support of friends and advisors who got him through that period, Tesla would never have existed. Even icons need Shadow Leaders.

We see the same thing in the Netherlands. **Pieter Zwart of Coolblue** is known as the man behind the "everything for a smile" culture. But he didn't build that in isolation. He always surrounded himself with experienced advisors and sparring partners who helped him stay sharp while the company exploded in growth. Like **Bart Kuijpers**. And Bart has shared some great insights about that on the website

<https://www.surpassingsuccess.com/>.

But you can't grow a successful organization on your own, or with just a small management team and a group of talented employees. That's where we come in. We are **Shadow Leaders**. An invisible but powerful network of experienced entrepreneurs, former CEOs, investors, and specialists. We stand by your side—both professionally and personally—so you can shine in your role without burning out or getting stuck.

2. Our conviction – Success is more than profit

Of course, turnover is important. Of course, profit is indispensable. But if that becomes the only measure, you often end up feeling empty, tired, or cynical. We believe that real growth only comes when you also grow personally: in energy, in leadership, in love for what you do.



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I, Rob Lucassen, have made the journey from entrepreneur to business coach with a spiritual slant. For years, everything revolved around targets and KPIs. Until I discovered that perhaps the most valuable KPI is peace of mind. And enjoyment in your daily life.

That's why I work according to the **7 spiritual laws of successful business**:

1. **Everything is love** – Even in business. Customers are not "conversions," but people. Partners are not "resources," but allies. Look at **Coolblue**: they built their entire culture around customer love, and it has paid off handsomely.
2. **There are no coincidences** – What you radiate, you attract. **Booking.com** started as a small Dutch website. By being open to collaboration with foreign investors and partners, they grew into a global player. No coincidence: they radiated ambition and attracted ambition.
3. **Go with the flow** – You don't have to force it. **Steve Jobs** found his best ideas while walking. **Adyen** didn't opt for quick profits, but for the long haul and a strategy that went with the flow. That took them to the stock market without any hasty leaps.
4. **Help** – Helping nourishes your soul and your business. **Swapfiets** didn't start with the question: how can we make money fast? They asked: how can we make cycling easier for students? That grew into an international company.
5. **Be grateful** – Gratitude opens the door to more. **Ali Niknam of Bunq** often says that he is grateful that he was able to build and sell TransIP, because that gave him the space to realize his real dream – Bunq.
6. **Energize & grow** – You can't build a million-dollar business on an empty energy reservoir. **Arianna Huffington** only discovered that after burning out. Dutch scale-ups are now increasingly investing in the vitality and energy of their teams. And with good reason.
7. **Enough is enough** – Success is not an endless pursuit. **Warren Buffett** has been doing it for years. And in the Netherlands, too, you hear entrepreneurs saying more and more often: "I don't just want to grow in terms of turnover, but also in terms of peace of mind."

3. What we do – Business acumen + personal guidance

That's why I became a Shadow Leader. Our strength lies in the mix. We are not traditional consultants who push your company into a spreadsheet using a standard model. Nor are we coaches who only ask questions and never get specific.



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We combine **hard business acumen** with **genuine personal guidance**.

In concrete terms, this means:

- **Strategic sparring:** a fresh, objective look at your plans, your business, and your leadership.
- **Unfiltered feedback:** honest, direct, and constructive. Not what you want to hear, but what you need to know.
- **Hands-on support:** help with growth, processes, digitization, and talent development.
- **Leadership coaching:** working on your energy, balance, and focus.

The result? You make better decisions, grow faster, and enjoy the ride more.

Example: In its early years, Adyen received guidance from experienced entrepreneurs. Their strategy of not just accepting any customer, but focusing on top international brands, was partly the result of critical sparring. It proved to be worth its weight in gold: today, they process billions.

4. Two ways to work with us

We don't believe in one-size-fits-all. But we do have two clear ways in which we support founders and leaders:

1. Shadow Leaders Advisor

A private collective of 10+ top professionals who are always available to you. For honest, strategic, and practical advice. No reports, just direct conversations.

- Available 6–8 hours per week
- Collaboration: 6–12 months
- Investment for SMEs and scale-ups: €5,950 per month (six-month contract) and €5,250 per month (one-year contract).
- Also available for larger (listed) organizations: rate on request

2. Shadow Leaders Non-Executive Director

Strategic boardroom sparring with someone who has been a CEO, CMO, or Sales Director themselves. This ensures you are well prepared for essential meetings with enterprise customers for large-scale projects (€100k+) or meetings with (future) investors or (co)founders, and that the meeting runs successfully.

- Available ±2 hours per week



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- Collaboration: 6–12 months
- Investment: from €4,500 p/m to €15,000 p/m for a six-month contract

Both processes are intensive. We only work with people who really want to grow and don't constantly procrastinate and make excuses. Because there will always be a fire to put out or something operational that requires attention. Deal with it!

Become a true leader who works on the business and not just in the business.

Example: When **Picnic** built its logistics model, they brought in experienced consultants to help them grow smarter. Without that strategic guidance, they would never have become the market leader they are today so quickly.

5. Who we work for – Not for everyone

We are selective. Not because we want to be elitist, but because we know where our impact is greatest.

Our ideal partners are:

- **Service-oriented companies** (SaaS, agencies, tech, blockchain, edtech, fintech, SMEs).
- **Minimum €2M in revenue:** you already have traction and a team, but you're looking to shift into the next gear.
- **Founders with guts:** willing to take an honest look at themselves.
- **Entrepreneurs who want to grow faster and smarter.**

Example: Booking.com was at a crucial point when they decided to seek guidance from international investors and strategists. That choice made the difference between being a medium-sized player and becoming the number one travel website in the world.

6. Why we are different – No egos, no PowerPoint

There are plenty of consultants, coaches, and advisors out there. Why should you work with us?

- **We've done it ourselves:** built, sold, failed, and won.
- **No egos:** we don't want to be in the spotlight. You are the star, we stand in the shadows.
- **No PowerPoint consultants:** we don't deliver thick reports that disappear into a drawer. We deliver progress.



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- **Business + personal growth:** strategy and spirituality, numbers and energy.
- **Customized:** tailored to you, your team, and your ambitions.

Example: For years, **Coolblue** was guided by an "advisory board" that kept Pieter Zwart on his toes. Without that network, there was a good chance they would have lost their culture in the storm of growth.

7. Invitation – It starts with one conversation

This is not a sales pitch. This is an invitation. An invitation to an honest conversation that will broaden your perspective—business, personal, and perhaps even spiritual.

In 30 minutes, we'll find out if we click. No hassle, no obligations. Just a conversation. If we click, we'll take the next step together. If we don't click, at least you'll have had an interesting conversation.

But imagine this scenario: you hang up the phone and suddenly feel at peace. Because you have someone who truly stands by your side. Someone who understands how heavy the burden can be and who is there not only to help your business grow, but also to help you grow as a person. How much would that be worth?

SUMMARY: what are the benefits?

1. You grow as a person (quickly)! Become a better version of yourself, more relaxed, more at ease, and worry less or even not at all, and experience less stress.
2. Your business will benefit greatly from your new, more focused attitude and behavior. Make better choices, manage people better, and motivate them better.
3. In your private life, your loved ones will also notice that you have become a different person.

So. The ball is now in your court... Free will on earth, right? You decide, and decide better based on your feelings, in other words, decide from your heart, because that is always right 😊

 **Schedule your 30-minute confidential conversation with Rob now.**

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Will you take the first step?



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Notes: